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Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Letter dated 12 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the report entitled "The War against Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage", prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan.

On the eve of the sixteenth anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide — terrible atrocities committed by the Armenian armed forces on 26 February 1992 as a result of which the town of Khojaly was burned to the ground, 613 people, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 elderly men were mercilessly killed, 1,275 persons were taken hostage, the fate of over 150 still remains unknown — I should state that not only the territories of Azerbaijan continue to be occupied, furthermore the ceasefire is repeatedly violated by the Armenian armed forces.

The positions of the Azerbaijani armed forces were shelled 7 times during the month of January, 5 times in February, 10 times in March, 15 times in April, 17 times in May, 20 times in June, 31 times in July, 165 times in August and 127 times in September 2007. One cannot but notice the considerable increase of fire from January to September. In 2007 alone 14 soldiers of the Azerbaijani armed forces were killed and 20 were wounded.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were distributed as a document of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 16 and 20 and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Agshin **Mehdiyev**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 12 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The War against Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage

Azerbaijan is one of the areas of earliest human settlement with a rich historical past and diverse cultural legacy. Different rock drawings, architectural monuments, samples of arts and crafts, as well as a great number of artefacts unearthed as a result of archaeological excavations testify to the country's distant past, its vast cultural heritage.

The occupation of 20 per cent of the Azerbaijani territory, which made approximately one out of every eight people in the country an internally displaced person or refugee, has also had catastrophic consequences for the country's cultural heritage both in the occupied territories and in Armenia.

The occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts of Kalbajar, Lachyn, Gubadly, Zangilan, Jabrayil, Fuzuli and Aghdam, as well as seven villages in the district of Gazakh and the village of Karki in Nakhchyvan, which are beyond Nagorno-Karabakh and border on Armenia, with 1,891 cultural resources, comprising 738 monuments, 28 museums with more than 83,500 exhibits, 4 picture galleries, 14 memorial complexes and 1,107 cultural establishments, led to a great cultural loss for Azerbaijan.

Among these monuments one could find architectural monuments of national importance, such as the sixth century Albanian Aghoghlan cloister and the fourteenth century Malik Ajdar tomb in Lachyn, the fourth century Albanian Amaras cloister and a considerable number of Albanian temples in Khojavand, the eighteenth century Asgaran castle, fourteenth century tombs and a number of Albanian temples dating back to the Middle Ages in Khojaly, the sixth century Albanian Saint Jacob and thirteenth century Albanian Khatiravang cloisters and the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries Lekh castle in Kalbajar, the Albanian cloister of the fifth to eighth centuries in Gazakh, the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries Mirali tomb and the seventeenth century caravanserai in Fuzuli, the fourteenth century tomb in Zangilan, the seventeenth century mosque complex in Jabrayil, the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries Yukhary and Ashaghy Govharagha and Saatly mosques, caravanserais and houses in Shusha, the nineteenth century mosque in Aghdam, and archaeological sites like Garakopaktapa, Khantapa, Gunashtapa, Uzuntapa, Meynatapa and Zargartapa, residential areas of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in Fuzuli, the residential areas of Chyragtapa and Garaghajy, of the Bronze Age, and those of Gavurgala, of the Middle Ages, and Aghdam, Imangazantapa and Gyshlag mounds of the Bronze Age in Jabrayil, rock drawings of the Bronze Age in Kalbajar, the stone box necropolis of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Khojaly, the residential area and necropolis of the Bronze Age in Sadarak, mounds of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Lachyn, a cave of the Stone Age, a mound and stone box graves of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Shusha, and the Shahri-Sharifan residential area of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries in Zangilan.

The occupied territories of Azerbaijan were not only rich with monuments classified as being of national importance, of which but a few are listed above, but also with those of world importance, for instance the 11- and 15-arch medieval

Khudafarin bridges and Niftaly mounds of the Bronze Age in Jabrayil, Albanian medieval Ganjasar and Khudavang cloisters in Kalbajar, the fourteenth century Gutlu Musa oghlu tomb and Uzarliktapa residential area of the Bronze Age in Aghdam, the Azykh and Taghlar caves of the Paleolithic Age in Khojavand, and mounds of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Khojaly.

Apart from its wealth of architectural and archaeological monuments and its spectacularly beautiful nature, Karabakh has been home to many talents, among whom Vagif, Natavan, Nawab, Hajybayov and Bulbul deserve special mention, whose legacy, for their great contribution not only to the Azerbaijani but also to the world's cultural heritage, has widely been recognized by the international community.

The ongoing policy of deliberate destruction of this legacy following the occupation has been and continues to be an irreparable blow both to Azerbaijani culture and world civilization. As has clearly been demonstrated in the deliberate change of the cultural look of Shusha and other towns and settlements of Karabakh by destroying the monuments and changing architectural features, and making "archaeological" excavations, this Armenian policy pursues far-reaching targets of removing any sign heralding their Azerbaijani origins.

Analysis of the period of 13 years since the declaration of a ceasefire in 1994 reveals the fact that the Armenian military actions have not destroyed Azerbaijani monuments to the extent to which this was subsequently done by the Armenian authorities later.

Thus, if in the years immediately following the military operations, in Shusha town the architectural monuments, such as the Yukhary and Ashaghy Govharagha mosques with their madrasahs, the mausoleum of Vagif, and the house of Natavan and caravanserais, have been destroyed, burnt, plundered and rendered unusable; the house of Aslan Garasharov, hero of the Second World War, has been razed to the ground and three new Armenian houses were built in its place. The later period proves the intensification of the barbarism, which has left almost no Azerbaijani monument without destruction or damage.

As for other districts, the "Imarat of Panah khan" complex, mosques in Aghdam town, Abdal and Gulably villages, the tomb of Ughurlu bay and the home museum of Gurban Pirimov in the Aghdam district, fourteenth century tombs in the Khojaly district, mosques in the Bashlybel and Otagly villages, ancient cemeteries in the Moz, Keshdak and Yukhary Ayrym villages and Kalbajar town in the Kalbajar district, mosques in the Zangilan, Gyrag Mushlan, Malatkeshin, Babayly and Ikinji Aghaly villages, medieval cemeteries in the Jahangirbayli, Babayly and Sharifan villages in the Zangilan district, ancient cemeteries in the Gayaly and Mamar villages, the mosque in Mamar village in the Gubadly district, the mosque in Garygyshlag village and the ancient cemetery in Zabukh village in the Lachyn district, the mosque complex in Chalabilar village and the ancient cemetery in Khubyarly village in the Jabrayil district, mosques in Fuzuli town and the Gochahmadli, Merdmli and Garghabazar villages in the Fuzuli district, the cemeteries of the Khojavand, Akhullu, Kuropatkino, Dudukchu and Salakatin villages and the old cemetery of Tugh village in the Khojavand district, the ancient hammams in Umudlu village in the Tartar district and the cemetery of Karki village in the Sadarak district, have been destroyed, burnt down and plundered.

The Museum of History in the Kalbajar district with its unique collection of ancient coins, gold and silverware, rare and precious stones, carpets and other handicraft wares, museums in Shusha, the Lachyn Museum of History, the Aghdam Museum of History and the Bread Museum and others have also been destroyed, plundered, and their exhibits put on sale in different countries. For example, the bronze statues of the poetess Natavan, the composer Uzeyir Hajybayov, the singer and musician Bulbul would have been sold as bronze scrap metal in Georgia if the Azerbaijani Government had not bought them for $500,000 and taken them to Baku. Similarly, a silver handbag from the Lachyn Museum of History was sold at a Sotheby's auction in London for $80,000.

Acts of barbarism are accompanied by different methods of defacing the Azerbaijani cultural image of the occupied territories. Among them are large-scale construction works therein, such as, for example, the building of an Armenian church in Lachyn town, the extension of the flight line of the Khojaly airport by destroying the children's music school, library, social club and infrastructure facilities. Another widespread practice employed is the change of the architectural details of different monuments, as the Saatly mosque and Khanlyg Mukhtar caravanserai in Shusha town, as well as replacement of the Azerbaijani-Muslim elements of the monuments with alien ones, such as the Armenian cross and writings, which have been engraved on the Arabic character of the nineteenth century Mamayi spring in Shusha town.

As for the fate of the Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage in Armenia, those monuments which survived until the beginning of the conflict have since been destroyed, such as the Damirbulag and Goy mosques of Yerevan. The former was razed to the ground, while the latter has been "restored" and presented as a Persian mosque. The mosques and other Azerbaijani monuments in other places of Armenia have also shared the same fate as the above-mentioned two, together with ancient or modern Azerbaijani cemeteries and toponyms of Azerbaijani origin, which have been erased from present-day Armenia.